

“Tipping” an Idea or Cause

“Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do.”

—Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*

This mini-lesson, which can be adapted for any high school or college class, can be used in as part of a larger unit in which students are discussing ideas or causes that they would like to promote—healthy lifestyle choices, cultural understanding, social justice initiatives—perhaps as the result of reading a novel or play with thought-provoking themes. The mini-lesson focuses on a work of nonfiction, *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell’s famous book about how diseases and social phenomena go “viral.” Each student will read a portion of Chapter One, “The Three Rules of Epidemics.” The three “rules” are (1) the Law of the Few, (2) the Stickiness Factor, and (3) the Power of Context. In groups of three, students will have a “write-around” (also known as “silent discussion” or “ink-shedding”) about what they have read. At the end the class will come together as a large group to share their insights and debrief.

Essential Question for the Lesson: What would it take to make _____ (the idea or cause the class has agreed upon as a focus) “tip”?

Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards:

- **Reading 1.** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- **Writing 9.** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- **Speaking and Listening 1.** Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Assessment:

- Written synthesis of silent discussion, drawing together textual evidence and collaborators’ viewpoints
- Contributions to small-group and whole-class discussions of the essential question and the text
- Evaluation criteria for both assessments: clarity of expression, synthesis of ideas, use of supporting evidence

Learning Plan:

1. The teacher leads a class review of the idea or cause that has been under discussion and introduces and explains the essential question, “What would it take to make _____ tip?”
2. The teacher distributes copies of Chapter One of *The Tipping Point* and reads aloud the opening section of the chapter, then explains the procedure for the remainder of the lesson.

3. The teacher divides the class into groups of three, and each student in a group is assigned a section of Chapter One: 1, 2, or 3.
4. Students read their assigned sections with the essential question in mind. They should underline and annotate to highlight key ideas.
5. When they have finished reading, each student should write about his or her assigned section for five to ten minutes—explaining the “rule” it illustrates (the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, or the Power of Context), citing details from the text, and reflecting on how this aspect of change might be applied to the goal of promoting the idea or cause that the class has agreed on. The teacher should circulate during this and subsequent steps to answer questions, monitor progress, and assist students as necessary.
6. Students then pass their papers to the left and receive the papers written by the students on their right. Each student reads what his or her peer has written and responds to it: agrees or disagrees, builds or changes directions, connects to the section he or she read or his or her own experience, citing evidence whenever possible. This reading and writing process should last five to ten minutes.
7. Next students repeat step 6, but in this round, they respond to both the original writing and the comment.
8. Students pass once more and receive their own papers back. They read over the responses to their writing and write a final comment synthesizing the silent discussion—points of agreement or disagreement, important insights, questions to considered further, etc.
9. Each small group then has an informal discussion of the members’ observations and conclusions—asking and answering clarifying questions, sharing information from different sections of the chapter, noting areas of overlap in their syntheses. The teacher should circulate during these discussions to encourage participation by all members of each group.
10. The students return to the large group for a teacher-led discussion and debriefing:
 - a. What ideas emerged about the essential question? Which ones merit further discussion?
 - b. How did this exercise work as a way of reading and responding to text?

The teacher should ensure that at least one member of each small group contributes. Students’ responses to question a may be recorded on chart paper or a SmartBoard for later use. Finally, the teacher should collect and review the students’ silent discussion/synthesis papers. Since this writing was informal and unrevised, it should be considered a formative assessment, not a graded assignment.

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